

Prayer Out of Soul Depths

"Out of the depths have I cried unto You, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice: let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications." Psalm 130:1-2.

Seasons of soul-depths are ever seasons of heart-prayer in the Christian's experience. At no period does the divine life of the regenerate so strongly and triumphantly vindicate its nature, and assert its reality and power, as then. This was the case under consideration. "Out of the depths have I cried unto you, O Lord." That must indeed be a "depth," a soundless depth of spiritual despondency, in which the soul is either debarred from prayer, or is so imprisoned, that it cannot send up its cries to God. But this was not the case of David. He gave himself immediately and unreservedly to prayer. "I cried unto you, O Lord."

What irrefragable evidence he affords of the existence of that spiritual life in the living soul which cannot die; of that faith in the believing soul which cannot be repressed; of that divine love in the loving soul which many waters cannot quench! Communion with God is the outbreathing of the quickened soul, and no distance can arrest, or condition stifle it.

"From the end of the earth will I cry unto you, when my heart is overwhelmed." Deep exercise of soul is often God's mode of rousing the slumbering spirit, and quickening the sluggish energy of prayer. Its potency and pre-eminence are only learned to any great extent when faith is tried, and the heart is overwhelmed, and the soul is plunged into great "depths." But, sink the soul as it may, the arrow of prayer, feathered with a divine promise, springing from the bow of faith, and winged by the power of the Spirit will overcome every obstacle, pierce every cloud, and fasten itself upon the throne of the Eternal God!

Was not this the experience of Jonah? "I cried by reason of my affliction unto the Lord, and He heard me; out of the belly of hell (his watery grave) cried I, and you heard me." But a greater than Jonah shall testify. Were there ever such fathomless soul depths as Christ's, when, as their Divine substitute, He bore their sins, endured their curse, and suffered the wrath of God on behalf of His people? "Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing." Behold, He prays! And as He advanced into the tornado of the curse, the storm thickening and darkening around Him- as He sank deeper and yet deeper into the mountain billows of divine wrath- the huge breakers surging and foaming around His holy soul- as He exhausted drop by drop 'the cup of trembling,' until the very lees touched His quivering lips, lo! "He Prayed More Earnestly!" The intensity of His prayer rose with the agony of His spirit; its earnestness gathered strength with the anguish of His soul. "Being in an agony He Prayed More Earnestly."

Sinking, suffering saint, learn the secret of your support! "He prayed more earnestly." "Who in the days of His flesh, when He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared." Go you and do likewise. Pray- pray- PRAY! Out of the depths of your difficulty, your need, your sorrow, cry mightily unto God. There is no 'depth' so profound, no darkness so dense, no need so pressing, or perplexity so great, but from it you may cry unto God, the Lord inclining His ear to the softest, faintest breathing of your soul. "For this shall every one that is godly pray unto you in a time when you may be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come near unto him." Cries out of the depths of soul-distress have a peculiar eloquence and an irresistible success with God just as the plaintive wail of a sick and suffering child reaches and penetrates a parent's heart more quickly and more deeply than all others. It is a beautiful thought embodied in the Psalmist's prayer: "My soul hangs upon God. "

Look for a moment at the Object upon which the believing, sinking soul thus hangs. It is upon DEITY. The world around is hanging upon every object but God. Some are hanging upon self, some upon their wealth- some upon their intellectual powers- some upon their bodily strength- some upon their long life- some upon the creature- some upon their own righteousness; all are hanging upon some object below Christ and God. How frail and fatal the support! Soon the prop bends- the stirrup breaks- the fulcrum yields- the sands glide away-

and great is the fall of him who suspended upon such created and fragile support his happiness in this life, and his hope of the life that is to come.

But, the believing soul, though a desponding and sinking soul, hangs upon GOD. Listen to the language of David: "O God, you are my God; early will I seek you: my soul thirsts for you, my flesh longs for you in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." Again: "Whom have I in heaven but You? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside You." This is the support of every gracious soul; and he who hangs not upon this divine support, hangs upon air, hangs upon nothing.

Listen to Jehoshaphat's prayer in his distress, when the mighty hosts of the Ammonites came against him to battle. See how he hung upon God! "O our God, will you not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that comes against us; neither know we what to do: our eyes are upon You." And the Lord delivered them into his hand that day, and all that he did was to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord. And thus was it with Asa. Oppressed by a powerful enemy, too strong for his scanty forces, he thus hung upon God in his extremity. "Lord, it is nothing with you to help, whether with many, or with those who have no power." And what a "nail in a sure place" is the Lord Jesus Christ, the true, spiritual Eliakim, upon whom the soul may hang its sins, and sorrows, and hope of glory. "I will fasten him," says the Father, "as a nail in a sure place. . . And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house all the vessels."

Sin-burdened soul, sinking into depths of guilt and despair, come; and hang in faith upon this Divine, this most sure nail, and you shall be saved! Hang upon Him as a personal Savior! Hang upon His blood to cleanse, upon His righteousness to justify, upon His grace to subdue, upon His fullness to supply, upon His willingness and power to save you to the uttermost extent of your sin and guilt. Hang upon God upon His strength to deliver you, upon His wisdom to counsel you, upon His love to comfort you, upon His infinite resources to meet your every need; and your song shall be,

"Other refuge have I none,
HANGS my helpless soul ON YOU."

Oh give yourself to prayer! If words fail you- if by reason of the anguish of your spirit there is no outlet for your feelings but in the plaintive language of sighs and groans and tears -still uplift your soul to God in mental supplication and heart breathing, and your testimony shall be that of David: "The Lord has heard the voice of my weeping." "Lord, all my desire is before You; and my groaning is not hid from You." And thus, when by reason of the anguish of your spirit, the cloud-veil of your mind, and the infirmity of your body, you can neither think nor pray, let the reflection cheer you that Jesus is thinking of, and praying for, you. "When I cannot think of Jesus," said a sick one whom He loved, "Jesus is thinking of me." Happy thought!

It is a truth fraught with the richest comfort that, sink the tried and desponding soul as it may, it can never sink below the everlasting arms of God. God is frequently wont to permit His children to descend into great "depths" of spiritual and mental conflict, and even temporal need, that He might display His love and power in stooping to their necessity. "I was brought low, and He helped me." "Bow down your ear to me; deliver me speedily: be my strong rock, for a house of defense to save me."

We are but imperfectly aware how low the great God can bend to our case- how condescendingly Christ can stoop to our condition! We may be brought very low- our case sad and desperate: riches may flee; poverty may come upon us as an armed man; character may be assailed; children may try; friends may change; enemies may wound; death may bereave; and our soul be plunged as into fathomless depths. Nevertheless, sink deep as we may, we shall but sink more deeply into the embrace of Christ, 'the everlasting arms' still underneath us. "He sent from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters." Oh we must descend into great depths of affliction, of trial, and of need, to fathom, in some measure, the soundless depths of God's love, of the Savior's fullness, of the Spirit's comfort!

And still our strong refuge is prayer- prayer in all depths. "Out of the depths have I cried unto You, O Lord." "From the end of the earth will I cry unto You, when my heart is overwhelmed." Oh, give yourself to prayer! No difficulty is too great, no trial too severe, to

take to Jesus. If your sins and guilt appear to you a depth so abysmal that no line could fathom it, remember that God's mercy in Christ Jesus is infinite; that, if there are great depths in your sinfulness and unworthiness, there are infinitely greater depths in the sin-forgiving love of God, in the sin-atonement blood and sinner-justifying righteousness of the Redeemer.

Sunk though you are in sin, steeped in crime and guilt, countless and great your departures from God, your rejection of the Savior, your religious unbelief, stifled convictions, and scarred conscience; nevertheless, you have not sunk below the depths of God's love and of Christ's grace. The prodigal had wandered far from his father, he had sunk into great depths of poverty and degradation and need; yet, when he 'came to himself' he exclaimed, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned; and his father saw him a great way off, and had compassion, and ran, and embraced him." That Father is your heavenly Father, and waits to enfold you to His loving and forgiving heart!

Depth of mercy! can there be
 Mercy still reserved for me?
 Can my God His wrath forbear,
 Me, the chief of sinners, spare?
 I have long withstood His grace,
 Long provoked Him to His face;
 Would not hearken to His calls,
 Grieved Him by a thousand falls.

JESUS, answer from above,
 Is not all Your nature love?
 Will You not the wrong forget?
 Suffer me to kiss Your feet?
 If I rightly read Your heart,
 If You all compassion art,
 Now Your ear in mercy bow,
 Pardon and accept me now."

But, prayer is necessary, not only when in our depths, but to be preserved from them. And to prayer must be united sleepless vigilance. "Watch and pray," is our Lord's twofold injunction, given on the most impressive occasion and amid the most affecting circumstances of His life. The calling of a child of God is high and holy. It is all the more essential that he should walk carefully, watchfully, and prayerfully, lest his feet slide; and thus, losing his steadfastness in the faith and his close communion with God, he fall into "the depths of Satan," the seductions of the flesh, and the allurements of the world; and so plunging into 'depths' of doubt, darkness, and despondency.

The path of spiritual declension is an 'sloped plane', each step accelerating the rapidity of the soul's descent. It commences at the closet. The restraining of prayer- especially private devotion-

is the first stage in the decay and declension of the believer in the divine life. Soon will follow the fascination and power of the world; and when the world enters like a flood, Christ and prayer and eternal realities are swept before its impetuous torrent, then the gracious soul is stranded upon the bleak, rock-bound coast of bitter remorse and dark despair.

What an appalling picture does the inspired penman draw of the final condition of the unregenerate apostate from his profession of Christ and the faith! "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame." Whatever interpretation these awful declarations will admit- and to the truly regenerate they cannot by any ingenuity of criticism, or justness of exegesis, properly apply, since a true child of God, though he may sadly backslide, and be sorely chastened, cannot finally perish- they yet are words of solemn significance, well calculated to fill the soul of the Christian professor, and even the true believer, with holy trembling, rousing him to the imperious and difficult task of unswerving self-vigilance and unwearied prayer.

The present chapter speaks pointedly and solemnly to the unconverted reader. There is beyond this present life a "depth" awfully and significantly termed "the bottomless pit." It is the final and eternal doom of all who die out of Christ. It is immeasurable and soundless. No line of grace can fathom it, no arm of mercy can reach it, no voice of love ever wakes its echoes, and eternity alone will see the end of its woe. "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." "The wicked shall be turned into hell."

But, is there no escape from a final and eternal doom so appalling? Listen to the voice of divine love. "Save him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom!" That ransom is the atoning blood of Jesus, and He the sinner's Ransomer. Escape for your life! Look not behind; but in faith hasten to Christ, the City of Refuge, and you shall be saved from the wrath that is to come! Oh, blessed thought! No poor awakened sinner ever betook himself to that Divine refuge and found the door closed against him. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved."

Soon the soul-desponding saint will ascend from the lowest depths of earth to the loftiest height of heaven. Long before the body springs from the dust, your soul, O believer, will have taken its place amid the blood-ransomed throng, clustering in shining ranks around the throne of God and the Lamb. And, reviewing all the way the Lord your God led you, through the wilderness and across the desert, you shall blend the old song of free grace with the new song of eternal glory, and exclaim,

"I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he has put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God."

"PARDON, my Master, pardon for my weakness, Thus shrinking, fainting, beneath my Father's rod; Oh, grant to me Your pure and patient meekness! Sincerely would I say, 'No will but Yours, O God.'

"Even as a reed by the rough tempest shivered,
Trembling I bend before Your chastening breath,
And low within my heart faith's flame has quivered,
Until all seemed shadowed like the vale of death.

"I strive to walk the stormy wave, upheaving
Its angry might, but sink wherever I tread;
I know Your covenant sure, but scarce believing,
Still hangs upon my breast my aching head.

"Your promises like countless stars are shining: I see them not; for the clouds the heavens obscure!

I wrestle hard against each vain repining, And fear to murmur when I would endure.

"Come to my help, O Master! once in sorrow,
My more than brother, King of glory now;
Even in my tears a gleam of hope I borrow
From the deep scars around Your radiant brow.

"Come to my help, as once God's angels hastened
To cheer You in Your midnight agony;
O Lord of angels, by man's suffering chastened,
Forget not I am dust, infirmity.

"Come to me quickly, even as You have spoken
Your faithful word. Let me but hear Your voice;
Say You are with me, and the heart all broken
Again with holy gladness shall rejoice.

"Now round the 'bruised reed' Your grace enwreathing,
Upward to heaven once more I shall aspire;

Now on my darkened soul Your Spirit breathing,
Brightly shall flame again the failing fire.

"Walk You the wave with me, the tempest stilling;
Let me but feel the clasping of Your strength,
Your righteous strength, through all my pulses thrilling;
Nor shall I fear to reach the shore at length.

"Beam forth, O Morning Star, in mercy glorious,
With Your day-promise, from the troubled sky;
Hold forth the fadeless crown, and palm victorious,
You who have fought and won, to cheer my eye.

"What means that strain, sweeter than angels' singing?
Oh, can it be Your own responsive word,
Mysterious music on my senses ringing
'Fear not, you trembler; for your prayer is heard'?

Contrition and Confession

"If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" Psalm cxxx. 3.

It is said, and we believe with truth, that, to the eye of the miner, entombed deep in the heart of the earth, the heavens appear at noonday studded with myriads of the most brilliant planets, invisible at the same moment from the earth's surface. The phenomenon is easy of solution. It is night with the miner, in his depths; and the darkest night reveals wonders and splendors which the brightest day conceals. May not this simple fact furnish an apt illustration of our present subject? Some of the most glorious unfoldings of God's character and of Christ's beauty, of divine truth and lessons of the Christian life, are found in those 'soul-depths' we have been describing, not always experienced by believers who, for the most part, dwell but upon the surface of the divine life.

Not the least important is the subject of our present chapter- the holiness of God, and the contrition and confession of the believer. "If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" To the consideration of these points let us address ourselves, as the Holy Spirit shall aid us. The subject is solemn and important- the most solemn and important of all subjects. Right and deep views of sin lie at the root of correct and high views of God; and low thoughts of God inevitably engender low perceptions of sin.

Dr. Owen, in his instructive Exposition of this Psalm, though somewhat verbose, thus forcibly puts the matter: "The generality of men make light work of sin; and yet in nothing does it more appear what thoughts they have of God. He that has light thoughts of sin had never great thoughts of God. Indeed, men's underrating of sin arises merely from their contempt of God. All sin's concernments place its relation unto God. And as men's conceptions are of God, so will they be of sin, which is an opposition to Him. This is the frame of the most of men; they know little of God, and are little troubled about anything that relates unto Him. God is not revered; sin is but a trifle; forgiveness a matter of nothing; whosoever will may have it for nothing. But shall the atheistical wickedness of the heart of man be called a discovery of forgiveness? Is not this to make God an idol? He who is not acquainted with God's holiness and purity, who knows not sin's deceit and sinfulness, knows nothing of forgiveness." The groundwork, then, of our present subject is, the essential holiness of God, upon which is based the soul's godly sorrow for sin. To these solemn points let us direct our devout attention.

The highest and most glorious perfection of God is His essential HOLINESS. He would cease to be God could He cease to be holy, holiness being, not an accident, but an intrinsic perfection of His Being. It is the uniting bond of all His other perfections, imparting existence, cohesion, and beauty to all. "The nature of God cannot rationally be conceived without it. Though the power of God be the first rational conclusion drawn from the light of His works and wisdom, the next from the order and connection of His works, purity must result from the beauty of His works. God cannot be deformed by evil who has made everything so beautiful in His time. The notion of a God cannot be entertained without separating from Him whatever is impure and bespotting, both in His essence and actions. Though we conceive Him infinite in majesty, infinite in essence, eternal in duration, mighty in power, and wise and immutable in His counsels, merciful in His proceedings with men, and whatever other perfections may dignify so sovereign a Being: yet if we conceive Him destitute of these excellent perfections, and imagine Him possessed with the least contagion of evil; we make Him but an infinite monster, and sully all these perfections we ascribed to Him before; we rather own Him a devil than a God. It is a less injury to Him to deny His Being than to deny the purity of it. The one makes Him no God, the other deformed, unholy, and detestable." (Charnock)

God is declared to be "glorious in holiness;" so holy that it is said "He cannot look upon sin;" that is, cannot look upon it but with infinite hatred and abhorrence. "You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and can not look on iniquity." He swears by His holiness. "Once have I sworn by my holiness, that I will not lie unto David." "The Lord will swear by His holiness."

Holiness, as we have remarked, is the luster and beauty of His Being. "How great is His beauty," because how perfect is His holiness! "Power is His arm; omniscience, His eye; mercy, His heart; eternity, His duration; HOLINESS, His BEAUTY." "The beauty of holiness."

Passing over the many exceptional proofs God has given of His hatred of sin, and His solemn determination to punish it- for example, the destruction of the old world by water, and that of the cities of the plain by fire; let us bend our thoughts to the most significant and appalling demonstration of His holiness the universe ever beheld, infinitely distancing and transcending every other- the sufferings and death of His only and beloved Son. The cross of Calvary exhibits God's hatred and punishment of sin in a way and to an extent which the annihilation of millions of worlds, swept from the face of the universe by the broom of His wrath, could never have done.

The Surety and Substitute of His elect Church; bearing her sins, and exhausting her curse- divine law and justice exacted from Him the utmost equivalent; the one, a perfect obedience, the other, the penalty of death. "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many." "Who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree." "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities." In all this we beheld a most awful display of God's hatred of sin. Finding the sins of the Church upon Christ as its Surety, Substitute, and Savior, the wrath of God was poured out upon Him without measure! To what other rational cause can we ascribe the profound emotion which these words describe: "My soul is sorrowful, even unto death." "And being in an agony He sweat great drops of blood, falling down to the ground." "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me"? He had never transgressed. "Holy, harmless, and undefiled," He was free from every taint of sin.

Jesus had never broken God's law; but, on the contrary, "had done always those things which pleased Him." And yet, pure and obedient though He was, God finding the sins of His people laid upon His Son, emptied upon His holy soul all the vials of His wrath due to their transgressions. Go, my soul, to Calvary, and learn how holy God is, and what a monstrous thing sin is, and how imperiously, solemnly, and holily bound Jehovah is to punish it, either in the person of the sinner, or in the person of a Surety.

Could the personal sinlessness of Christ exempt Him from this terrible punishment? Could it in any measure lessen or mitigate the tremendous infliction of God the Father's wrath? Impossible! It was not Christ who was penally punished: it was the sins of His elect Church, which He voluntarily and fully bore, punished in Him. Never was the Son of God dearer to the Father than at the very moment that the sword of divine justice, flaming and flashing, pierced to its hilt His holy heart. But it was the wrath of God, not against His beloved Son, but against the sins which met on Him when presenting Himself on the cross as the substitutionary sacrifice and offering of His Church. He "gave Himself for us." What a new conception must angels have formed of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, when they beheld the flaming sword of justice quenched in the holy, loving bosom of Jesus! And in what a dazzling light does this fact place the marvellous love of God to sinners! Man's sin and God's love- the indescribable enormity of the one, and the immeasurable greatness of the other- are exhibited in the cross of Christ as nowhere else. Oh to learn experimentally these two great facts- sin's infinite hatefulness, and love's infinite holiness! The love of God in giving His Son to die; the love of Christ in dying; the essential turpitude and unmitigated enormity of SIN, which demanded a sacrifice so Divine, so holy, and so precious!

On the wings of faith uprising,
 Jesus crucified I see;
 While His love, my soul surprising,
 Cries, 'I suffered all for thee.
 Then, beneath the cross adoring,
 Sin cloth like itself appear,
 When the wounds of Christ exploring,
 I can read my pardon there.
 Angels here may gaze and wonder
 What the God of love could mean,

When that heart was torn asunder,
Never once defiled with sin.

Nor this alone. In the cross of Christ we not only see the enormity of man's sin and the greatness of God's love, but in the Atonement there offered the believing soul beholds the entire cancelling of all his transgressions, the complete blotting out of the thick cloud of all his guilt. Viewed in this light, as a penitent believer, you have nothing, in the sense of propitiation, to do with your sins. The work of propitiation is all done by Christ your Surety. "Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation for our sins;" and when this was done, "there remains no more sacrifice for sins." Christ's one offering of Himself has forever perfected those who are sanctified. Cease, then, to look upon the great debt as though Jesus had not discharged it; upon the mighty bond; as though He had not cancelled it; upon your countless sins, as though His blood had not washed them all away.

You have nothing to do with your sins- past, present, or to come- but to mortify the root, to combat vigorously their ascendancy, and to wash constantly in the divine laver of Christ's atoning blood, confessing daily and hourly sins, with the hand of faith laid upon the head of the sacrificial Lamb thus walking as before God with a quickened, tender, purified conscience, desiring in all things to please Him.

"If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" CONTRITION is the first feeling in David's experience which these words indicate. It was in the "depths" that this most holy grace was inspired. The believer has need to be brought into a very close knowledge of himself to learn what true and deep contrition for sin is. The deepest humiliation, the warmest tears, the most broken and contrite spirit, are not often found in the 'high places' where the soul is privileged to walk. We must descend from the mount into the valley, and in the valley "lie low in a low place" yes, the lowest; to learn the meaning and force of David's prayer: "O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great;" and of Job's acknowledgment: "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Oh, what a volume of meaning do these words contain, as they apply to our individual selves: "If You, Lord, should mark iniquities," my iniquities- the depravity of my nature, the sinfulness of my heart, the unrighteousness of my most holy things- my thoughts and imaginations, my words and actions, my covetousness, worldliness, and carnality; my low aims, selfish motives, and by-ends; O Lord, how could I stand? In this light we must interpret David's contrite words; and thus interpreted, with what solemnity and self-application will they come home to every bosom in which throbs one pulse of spiritual life- in which glows one spark of divine love!

Cultivate, beloved, a holy contrition for sin. Subject your heart to the closest anatomy, your actions to the most searching analysis, your mental conceptions, motives, and words, to the most rigid and faithful scrutiny. This godly sorrow, and holy contrition, will preserve your heart pure and tender, your spirit lowly and watchful, your holy posture and place ever low beneath the cross.

An old divine thus appropriately discourses: "The merchant never allows a single day to elapse without taking an account of what he may have gained or lost in the course of it: let us do the same by our souls. Let not one evening pass over our heads without our examining how our spiritual account stands; let us enter into the inmost recesses of our heart, and ask ourselves, "In what have I offended God during the day? Have I indulged in idle conversation? Have I sinned by neglecting to perform my duties? Have I tried too hardly the patience of any of my debtors? Have I tried too hardly the patience of any of my brethren? Have I injured the reputation of any one by my words? When I have seemed to take part in holy things, has not my mind been occupied with the affairs of this world? When the concupiscence of the flesh has presented its dangerous poisons to me, have I not voluntarily inclined my lips towards the cup? And under whatever of these or other heads we may find ourselves on the debtor side, let us lament over our transgressions from our inmost souls, and labor to make up tomorrow what we may have lost today."

The effect of this holy scrutiny will be humble contrition, and that in its turn will be exceedingly bitter; nevertheless, the more bitter our repentance, the sweeter the fruit. It is said by naturalists that the bitterest flower yields the sweetest honey. Bitter in their bud, fruits gain

sweetness as they advance to maturity; so it is with the exercises of penitence- they begin by being bitter, but they end by growing sweet.

Hence our dear Lord said, "Blessed are those who weep." What! are tears blessed? Is weeping sweet? Yes! Not the tears falling upon the coffin and the grave of loved ones of whom death has bereaved us; not the tears wept over ruined fortune, and lowered circumstances, and alienated friendship; but, blessed are they who weep over their sins, lament their backslidings, and mourn their spiritual lapses and wilful wanderings from the strait and narrow road to heaven, as beneath the shadow of the cross.

CONFESSION is another element of David's acknowledgment. "If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" These words involve a personal and humble acknowledgment of sin on the part of the psalmist. Confession of sin is a consequence of contrition for sin. No grace in the 'royal penitent' was more conspicuous than the grace of confession to God. "I acknowledged my sin unto You, and my iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord." "I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me."

And here we touch upon a duty- no, a privilege- the most holy, spiritual, and sanctifying of the Christian life- confession of sin to God. What a significant and magnificent confession have we in these words: "If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" We cannot urge upon the reader a more spiritual, purifying, and comforting habit than this. It seems to involve every spiritual grace of the Christian character; an intelligent apprehension of sin, sincere repentance, deep humiliation, living faith, holy love, and a simple turning of the soul to Jesus.

Why is it that so many of God's saints travel all their days with their heads bowed like a bulrush? Why so few attain to the high standard of an assured interest in Christ? Why so many walk in the spirit of legal bondage, knowing little or nothing of their pardon, adoption, and acceptance? May it not, to a great degree, be traced to their lax habit of confession of sin to God? It is because they go day by day, and week by week, bearing along their lonely, dusty road, the burden of conscious sin and uncleansed guilt. Oh, the great secret of a pure, holy, and happy walk is in living close by God's confessional- is in going with the slightest aberration of the mind, with the faintest consciousness of guilt, and at once, with the eye upon the blood, unveiling and acknowledging it, without the slightest concealment or mental reservation, to God! So long as this holy privilege is neglected, guilt, like a corroding poison, an inflamed wound, a festering sore, eats as a canker into the very vitals of our peace and joy and hope.

This was David's testimony: "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin unto You, and my iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and You forgave the iniquity of my sin."

Do not suppose that, because contrition and confession were among the earliest exercises of your conversion, that there they ended. God forbid! They belong to each stage, and should trace every step of the Christian life. The close of that life is often marked by the deepest, holiest, and most evangelical sorrow for sin; the dying eye moistened with contrition's last and latest and most precious tear. What most endears the open Fountain? What leads us the most frequently and the most believingly to bathe in its ever-fresh, ever-flowing, ever-cleansing stream? What makes Jesus so precious? Oh, it is the daily, the constant habit of confession. We must ever remember that the Paschal Lamb was eaten with bitter herbs, and that those bitter herbs imparted a sweetness to the sacrificial offering. And thus it is that, the bitter herbs of repentance, blended with a holy confession of sin at the cross, imparts a higher estimation of the Atonement, an additional sweetness to the blood, and renders the Savior more precious to the heart. Oh the peace, the repose, the light, which springs from the confession of sin to God, no imagination can conceive or words express!

A simple personal incident may illustrate the idea. Sauntering on one occasion through the 'long-drawn aisles' of a Roman Catholic Cathedral, my eye was arrested by one of the numerous dreary-looking "confessionals" which invariably obtrude from the walls of those foreign edifices. While musing upon the object, a young female in modest attire approached, and, prostrating herself at the feet of the ghostly priest, placed her mouth close to his ear as he

bent his head to receive her confession. In a short time she arose, and with a flushed countenance, a beaming eye, and an air of conscious relief, passed me quickly on her way. She had unveiled the sacred, and perhaps guilty, secrets of her heart to the ear of the ghostly confessor, had received his "absolution," and retired from the church with the aspect of one from off whose soul a terrible weight of sin and terror had been removed. And, as in solemn reflection I gazed upon the melancholy spectacle, I thought If such the soul-peace, such the mental relief, which confession to a poor sinful mortal induces- false though it be; what must be the divine, what the true repose and comfort of a humble, penitential, and unreserved confession of sin to God, through Christ Jesus!

Christian do not carry the burden of your sin a single step further; the moment the consciousness of guilt and departure from God oppresses you, however apparently slight it may appear- a thought, a look, a passion, a word, an act- repair immediately to the feet of Jesus, disclose it without the slightest mental reservation, and, by a renewed application of atoning blood, seek its immediate and entire removal. Thus penitentially confessing and divinely absolved, you shall arise from the feet of the great High Priest, exclaiming, with a lightened conscience and a praiseful heart, "I acknowledged my sin unto You, and my iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and You forgave the iniquity of my sin."

"If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" The false and fatal idea of the ungodly is, that God does not "mark" -that is, does not notice or record "iniquity" - forgetting the solemn declarations of His own word: "The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He ponders all his goings." "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." Oh that these weighty declarations may sink deep into our hearts! The most holy saint of God needs them.

If the Lord should mark, ponder, chasten the iniquity of our most holy things- the double motive, the self-seeking end, the sinful infirmity, which attaches to our best and holiest doings, who of us could stand in His presence? All that we do for God, and for Christ, and for our fellows, is deformed and tainted by human infirmity and sin. A close scrutiny and analysis of our most saintly act would discover the leprosy of iniquity deeply hidden beneath its apparent loveliness and sanctity. How humbling, yet how true! We have need to weep over our tears, to repent of our

repentances, to confess our confessions; and, when our most fervent prayer has been breathed, and our most self-denying act has been performed, and our most liberal offering has been presented, and our most powerful sermon has been preached, and our sweetest anthem has poured forth its music, we have need to repair to the "blood that cleanses from ALL sin," even the sins of our most holy things!

How instructive and impressive the type! "You shall make a plate of pure gold, and grave upon it, like the engravings of a signet, HOLINESS TO THE LORD.... And it shall be upon Aaron's forehead, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall be always upon his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord." Thus has Christ, our true Aaron, made a full Atonement for the "iniquity of our holy things;" and the mitre is always upon His head, that our persons and our offerings may be ever accepted before the Lord.

This brings us to the answer which the Gospel supplies to the searching, solemn question: "If You, Lord, should mark iniquity, who shall stand?" The Gospel reveals Christ as the Great Sin-Bearer of the sinner, and this is the answer of faith to the solemn, searching challenge. We can do nothing in the way of penitence, confession, and forgiveness until we see all our sins and iniquities- both those of our unconverted, and those of our converted life- laid upon Jesus. We must see Him "wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities." We must see Him who knew no sin made a sin-offering for us; our sins put upon Christ, and, in return, His righteousness put upon us; Christ and the sinner thus changing places, the One assuming the sin, and the other receiving the righteousness. "For He has made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." And now, when the question returns with personal force, "Should God mark my iniquities, how can I stand?" let faith, resting upon the divine word, answer, "Jesus is my Substitute: Jesus stood in my place:

Jesus bore my sins: Jesus did all, suffered all, and paid all in my stead, and here I rest." Oh, yes, the believing sinner, robed with the righteousness of Christ, stands now before the holy Lord God, freely and completely justified from all things; and will stand in the great day of the Lord without spot or wrinkle, when the heavens and the earth are fleeing before His face, and when the wicked are calling upon the rocks and the mountains to fall upon them, and hide them from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of His wrath will have come, and who shall be able to stand?"When from the dust of death I rise to take my mansion in the skies, Even then shall this be all my plea, Jesus has lived and died for me." Bold shall I stand in that great day; For who aught to my charge shall lay? While through Your blood absolved I am from sin's tremendous curse and shame."